



KÁROLY RÉDEI (Wien)

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROTO-URALIC PLURAL SUFFIX $*-t$ ¹

1. Theoretical considerations

Number is one of the most widely spread grammatical categories. The most common type is found in languages which distinguish singular from plural. In addition, there are languages with a dual, or more rarely, a trial number. In contrast to the languages with the category of number there is a small number of languages (and language families) in which this category is totally lacking, or in which it has developed only rudimentarily. Naturally, even in these languages the opposition of one vs many (individual and collective concepts) can — if required by context — be expressed. As a general rule, singular and plural are distinguished from one another in that the unmarked word (with no distinctive feature) is the singular, whereas the marked word (with a distinctive feature) is the plural. The plural form contains some sort of suffix or is somehow derived. On the basis of these criteria number can be regarded as a universal category (Greenberg 1976 : 27–28; Erhart 1993 : 46). Another universal regularity is that there is no language with a trial, but no dual number and no language with a dual, but no plural number (Панфилов 1976 : 19).

The grammatical expression of number can be realized in various ways.

1) Number is not marked at all. The linguistic form (noun) is indifferent as regards the number. It marks only class (genus); quantity is expressed with lexical means. This type of number is called the crypto-grammatical category. For example, Old Javanese (Kavi), belonging to the Austronesian language family, possesses no numeral category. Context decides whether one or more objects are being talked about. Reduplication also occurs to indicate the concept of plurality (Панфилов 1976 : 19; Erhart 1993 : 46).

2) We speak of a pre-grammatical category of number when the formal marking of class affiliation denotes at the same time quantity, too (some classes having singular, others plural value). Such a language is, for example, Indonesian in which the morpheme form \emptyset denotes singular number and indefinite plural. In addition, the prefix *se-* can express the singular and some facultative means (such as reduplication) can also express the plural. In the Chinese language the noun does not denote an individual object, but rather the totality, the class, of

¹ The present article was already written at the time László Honti's thorough article appeared (Honti 1997). In a later article I wish to deal further with one or two questions discussed there, particularly with the Permian continuation of PU $*t$ assumed by L. Honti.

like things. If the quantity of a concept is put concretely (e.g. in the case of words denoting person), the suffix *-men* is used (Панфилов 1976 : 19–20; Erhart 1993 : 46).

3) Number can be regarded as a semigrammatical category when the plural is denoted with a special sign of number. The form without suffix is indifferent as regards the number, i.e. the form without the distinctive feature denotes singular and plural (*numerus absolutus*). We can regard it as being a general rule that the indifferent form is used in the category of inanimate objects (*genus inanimatum*), while the form containing the plural sign is found in the category of living creatures (*genus animatum*). In addition, the unmarked form denotes indefinite quantity, the marked form denoting definite quantity. Numeral categories such as this are to be found in Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusian languages, in several Paleosiberian languages (e.g. in Yukagir), as well as in numerous Indian languages, for example in the Algonquian language family (cf. Gabain 1950 : 84; Turkologie 1963 : 14–15, 36, 39, 67, 111, 145, 166, 187–188; Mongolistik 1964 : 60–61, 215; Tungusologie 1968 : 38, 57–58, 142, 264; Крейнович 1958 : 70 ff.; Greenberg 1976 : 40; Erhart 1993 : 47). It is important to note that the plural suffixes of the Altaic languages are for the most part collective derivate affixes. As regards the usage of number in Turkic, let us cite Annemarie von Gabain's words, "Ein endungsloses Substantiv kann nicht nur die Funktion eines Nominativs und eines Kasus indefinitus haben, sondern, da seine Grundbedeutung meist generell, nicht individuell ist, kann darunter sowohl Einzahl als auch Mehrzahl gemeint sein. *at* ist 'ein Pferd' und auch 'Pferde', *on iki ada* 'zwölf Inseln', d.h. 'der Dodekanes'; die Anwendung der Pluralendung *+lar* individualisiert die einzelnen Dinge dieser Vielheit: *on iki ada+lar* besagt, daß man an jede einzelne der zwölf Inseln denkt. Dem Prädikatnomen kann die Pluralbezeichnung *+lar* fehlen, wenn sie bereits beim Substantiv angefügt ist" (Turkologie 1963 : 14–15).

4) The characteristics of the grammatical categorie of number in this type (Indo-European, Semitic, Bantu languages) are: a) singular and plural stand in equipollent opposition to one another; b) congruence in nominal groups. Number has no special formal expression. The number grammemes are connected with the case grammemes (Indo-European languages) or with those of the nominal category (Bantu languages), that is, we are dealing with complex morphemes (Erhart 1993 : 47).

Number became a proper grammatical category after the development of congruence. It can be regarded as a universal that the category of number came about in the nominal category (subject). Denoting the number in verb is not obligatory in all languages. For example, in English: *the child ran off/the children ran off* and in Swedish: *barnet sprang bort/barnen sprang bort* id. For the Turkic languages cf. Turkologie 1963 : 188. Thus, congruence originates from the subject: "Wird beim Prädikat durch Kongruenzzeichen auf das Subjekt Bezug genommen, erinnert das Verhältnis Subjekt : Prädikat an das Verhältnis Determinans : Determinatum [---] Es besitzt also das jeweils zugeschriebene Element eine morphologische Markierung, die auf dasjenige Element verweist, dem etwas zugeschrieben wird" (Ostrowski 1982 : 258–259; cf. also Lehmann 1988 : 58–59).²

The following types of congruence are possible between the subject (S) and the predicate (V): 1) S^{Sing.} + V^{Sing.}, 2) S^{Plur.} + V^{Plur.}, 3) S^{Sing.} + V^{Plur.}, 4) S^{Plur.} + V^{Sing.}.

² My colleague, László Honti, called my attention to these two articles and I would like to express my gratitude for this here, too.

In the Uralic languages all four of these types can be found: 1) Finnish *hevo-**nen juoksee* 'the horse is running', Hungarian *a ló fut id.*; 2) Finnish *hevose-**t juoksevat* 'the horses are running', Hungarian *a lovak futnak id.*; 3) Cheremis *kombo počela čonyeštat* 'the geese [singular] are flying in a row'. 4) Finnish *yri-**tyksen johtoon tulee uudet miehet* 'the new men are joining the company's board of management', Hungarian *az én szemeim a világi jót nem látja* 'my eyes do not see earthly good' (cf. Karlsson 1962 : 195 ff.; Tauli 1966 : 267 ff.). In incongruent sentences the singular or the plural subject refers to a (definite) entirety.

2. Uralic plural suffix **t*

After this introduction and comments on theoretical aspects I should like to discuss the origin of the Uralic plural suffix **t*. Reflexes of the PU plural suffix **t* are present in the following languages: Finnish *kalat* 'fish — pl. [nom.-acc.]' (sing. *kala*), gen. pl. *kalain* < **kalaen* < **kalaδen*; Estonian *kalad* id., gen. pl. *kalade* (in Estonian the plural genitive form entered the plural oblique cases: inessive *kalades*, adessive *kaladel*); Lappish *guolek* id. (*k* < **t*; sing. *guolle*); Mordvinian *kalt* id. (sing. *kal*); Ostyak Kaz. *χḷḷat* id. (sing. *χḷḷ*); Vogul So. *χḷḷat* id. (sing. *χḷḷ*); Samoyede Yurak *χāl'e?* id. (sing. *χāl'e*), Selkup (genus animatum) *qēlīt* id. (sing. *qēlī*). The development **t* > ? also took place in the Yenisej and Tavgi Samoyede languages (cf. Rédei 1981 : 210—211).

There is no reflex of the PU plural suffix **t* in Cheremis, the Permian languages or Hungarian. These languages use secondary plural suffixes of collective derivative affix origin. In Cheremis there are several plural suffixes: Hill Cheremis *-wlä*, Northwest *-wlä*, *-šaməc*, *-šäc*, Joškar-Ola *-šaməc*, Central, Volga *-šaməč*, Vjatka *-lak*, Ufa *-włak*; (all dialects) *-la/-lä* (Bereczki 1990 : 30); Zyrian *-jas*, Ud. *-jəs*, P *-jez*, *-ez*, Yazva *-jəz*; Votyak *-jos*, *-os* < Ancient Permian **jösə* 'folk, people' (Rédei 1963 : 374—375; 1988 : 379—380); Hungarian *-k* < **kka/-*kkü* (Rédei 1981 : 213).

From the point of view of the origin and ancient use of the PU plural suffix **t*, it is an important fact that in Finnish *-t* originally occurred only in the nominative case (in the role of subject). Today it is also used to denote the accusative plural. Its usage in the genitive and its spreading throughout the entire Estonian plural paradigm is likewise secondary. In the Finnish oblique cases *i* (PU **i* < **j*) is used: *taloissa* 'in the houses', *ihmisille* 'to the persons'. In certain stem types this *i* is also present in Estonian where, however, it usually merged with the stem-final vowel, forming then a complex morpheme, e.g. partitive plural *jalgu*, inessive plural *jalus* (*jalg*, gen. *jala* 'leg'), partitive plural *raamatuid*, illative plural *raamatuisse* (*raamat*, gen. *raamatu* 'book'). The PU **i* < **j* is present only in few Uralic languages (Finnic, Lappish, Hungarian, Samoyede), which at all events indicates that its usage in the proto-language was not general, but I would not like to go into this question here (Ravila 1938 : 289—290; Rédei 1981 : 211 ff.). From the point of view of the original situation it is important to note that in the Mordvinian indefinite nominal declension the singular forms are also used in the plural (Paasonen 1953 : 2; Keresztes 1990 : 53—55, 194). In the Ob-Ugrian languages *-t* has also been generalized in the oblique cases.

All this shows that the usage of PU **t* could not have been general in the proto-language, i.e. that the plural was not yet a firmly established category. With the following examples I would like to draw attention to the fact that as regards the number, the indifferent form (numerus absolutus) is still widely used in the Uralic languages, the Indo-European languages using the plural in such

cases, e.g.: a) after numerals: Hungarian *tíz ember* 'ten people', Finnish *kymmenen ihmistä* id., Zyrian *das mort* id.; b) names of double body parts: Hungarian *reszket a keze* 'his hands are trembling'; c) Words designating living beings are often used in the singular (the earlier numerus absolutus) if emphasis is placed not on the naming of the individuals, but on the totality of the concept. Hungarian *jön a török* 'the Turks are coming'; Vogul *jáməs nē, jáməs xum xalt* 'among good women and men' (VNGy. IV 12); Cheremis *kombo počela čonyeštat* 'the geese are flying in a row' (Beke 1911 : 170), *piše tōškə tuškə tōštəl koštət* 'the dogs run to and fro' (literally: 'go jumping'), *ku-δəšto jiše-m wučə-t* 'my family is waiting at home' (Bereczki 1990 : 74). In these Cheremis examples the subject is in the singular and the predicate is in the plural; d) Sometimes the singular denotes the totality of the concept in the case of inanimate objects, too. Hungarian *virágot szedtem* 'I picked flowers', *almát vett* 'he bought apples'; Cheremis *ti wərye-m bōrəktəmbələ* 'these clothes are turned inside out' (Beke 1911 : 170), *šū-šūr jū-šūm jo-lyəžšət* 'the stars shine by night' (Bereczki 1990 : 74).

The totality of the concept can also be expressed by the other type of incongruence with the subject (sometimes another sentence component, e.g. the object) being in the plural and the predicate in the singular: Hungarian (dialect) *léhuzza a harmatot azok a hegyek* 'those mountains draw down the dew' (Tauli 1966 : 271); Votyak *mil'am pijos čupaloz* 'our young men kiss' (Tauli 1966 : 270); Cheremis *čodra-šte puše-nyə-ša-məc šo-lyə šu-en* 'in the forest the trees stand far apart' (Bereczki 1990 : 75); Finnish *koivusta karisi lehdet* 'the leaves fell from the birch tree' (Tauli 1966 : 270). Cf. additionally the last paragraph of the first section.

The use of the singular form (indifferent number, numerus absolutus) in place of the plural, as well as the secondary plural suffixes of certain Finno-Ugric languages (Cheremis, Permian languages, Hungarian) all indicate that the PU plural suffix **t* did indeed have its origin in the Uralic era but did not immediately become general, being used at first merely in the category of living creatures and in determination. Its spectrum of use was likely restricted here, too. In the beginning it was employed solely in the nominative plural, its penetration into the oblique cases — where this happened — taking place in the separate lives of the individual languages. Of course, the indifferent number (numerus absolutus) was retained in numerous Uralic languages although restricted to a narrow spectrum of use. In fact, it was after the development of the plural suffix *-t* that the new way of expressing not the individual, but the universal totality of like objects originated: S^{Plur.} + V^{Sing.}.

3. Paavo Ravila, one of the most outstanding scholars in the field of theoretical Uralic studies and syntax, opens his discussion concerning the origin of the plural suffix **t* with the Cheremis sentence structure of the type *kombo počela čonyeštat* 'the geese [literally: the goose] are flying in a row'. He argues that the **t* appeared first in the predicate, whereas the plural was not formally expressed in the remaining sentence components. In his opinion the PU sentence would have had the following structure (expressed in modern Finnish): **lintu lentävät* 'the birds (literally: the bird) fly'. Later, due to reasons of congruence the *-t* was taken over into the subject: **lintut (> linnut) lentävät* (Ravila 1938 : 286—297; 1941 : 95 ff.; cf. also Rédei 1981 : 214).

P. Hajdú (Хайду 1985 : 234—236; Hajdú, Domokos 1987 : 232) is sceptical of P. Ravila's explanation. He feels that the Cheremis construction cannot convincingly be traced back to the Uralic proto-language. I believe that this is not what shakes P. Ravila's theory.

4. As shown above, the Cheremis sentence type *kombo počela čoyještāt* 'the geese (literally: goose) fly in a row', in which the subject is formed by an indifferent form with no distinctive feature (numerus absolutus), reflects the ancient state of affairs. This, as we have seen, is also supported by the facts from other languages and by theoretical considerations.

In my opinion, the error of P. Ravila's explanation lies in his view that the plural suffix *-t* originated in the predicate. The development of the category of number is, however, only possible within the nominal category (noun) (cf. in this regard section 1). Therefore, congruence spread from the subject to the predicate. The subject was the determiner of the predicate (cf. Ravila 1938 : 296; Ostrowski 1982 : 258—259; Lehmann 1988 : 58—59). It follows from this argument that the original function of PU *-t was that of determination. Determination, on the other hand, was at first necessary in the category of living beings. In the category of inanimate objects the unmarked, numerus absolutus form with no distinctive feature was still used for a considerable time. Thus, varying P. Ravila's example I would reconstruct the ancient sentence structure as: **lintut lentä/lentävä* > **lintut lentät/lentävät*. This **t* originally expressing determination, then the plural quantity of living beings, can in all likelihood be traced back to the PU demonstrative pronouns **tä* (~*te~*ti) 'dieser', **ta* 'der hier, dieser da', **to* 'jener'. On the basis of the prevailing speech situation it can be assumed that all demonstrative pronouns beginning with *t* were involved in the development of the plural suffix **t*. In Cheremis *t* was retained only as a verbal personal suffix in the third person plural. Its occurrence as a plural verbal personal suffix leads us to the conclusion it once was also present in the nominal paradigm in words denoting living creatures and in determination. At the same time the survival of the numerus absolutus could have led to the place of the plural suffix **t* in the number category, being taken over in several languages by secondary plural suffixes deriving from collective derivative suffixes.

Abbreviations

Mongolistik — Altaistik. Zweiter Abschnitt. Mongolistik, Leiden—Köln 1964 (Handbuch der Orientalistik, Band V); **Tungusologie** — Altaistik. Dritter Abschnitt. Tungusologie, Leiden—Köln 1968 (Handbuch der Orientalistik, Band V); **Turkologie** — Altaistik. Erster Abschnitt. Turkologie, Leiden—Köln 1963 (Handbuch der Orientalistik, Band V); **VNGy.** — B. M u n k á c s i, *Vogul népköltési gyűjtemény I—IV*, Budapest 1892—1921.

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КАРОЙ РЕДЕЙ (Вена)

О ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИИ ПРАУРАЛЬСКОГО СУФФИКСА МНОЖЕСТВЕННОГО ЧИСЛА **t*

Категория числа в разных языковых системах выражается по-разному: а) «криптограмматически» (множественное число не имеет формального признака); б) «предграмматически» (одни классы слов имеют значение единственного числа, другие — множественного); в) «полиграмматически»: наряду с формально не выраженными формами (число неопределенное, число абсолютное), для передачи определенного количества используется специальный суффикс множественного числа; г) «грамматически»: категория числа специального признака не имеет, значение падежа и числа выражается с помощью составной морфемы.

Употребление суффикса множественного числа **t* в прауральском языке не было всеобъемлющим, он использовался в категориях одушевленности и определенности. Во всех других случаях употреблялось неопределенное число. Развитие категории определенного числа было возможно лишь у существительных: **t* был перенесен в предикат благодаря конгруэнции. Говоря современным языком, структуру древнего предложения можно реконструировать следующим образом: **lintut lentä/lentävä* > **lintut lentät/lentävät* (ср. фин. *linnut lentävät*) 'птицы летят'.